

# Periodontal Disease



**Gingivitis**



**Red, swollen gum**



**Periodontal Disease**



**Severe bone and gum loss  
due to periodontitis**



**Tooth being measured  
with a probe to see how  
bad the disease is**

## **What is periodontal disease?**

Periodontal disease, also called gum disease, is an infection that affects the tissue and bone that hold your teeth in place. Gingivitis is a mild infection of the gums. It can be cured with special cleanings from the dentist and proper brushing and flossing. It does not cause any changes to the bone. Periodontitis, which is more severe, will cause spaces or pockets to form around the teeth where the gums and bone have been destroyed. These pockets are hard to keep clean. If left untreated, more bone will be lost which may cause tooth loss.

## **What causes periodontal disease?**

Some of the bacteria in the mouth make poisons that irritate the gums and destroy bone. Other causes may be changes in hormones, illnesses that affect your immune system, poor oral hygiene habits, smoking and some medications. If you have a family history of gum disease you are also more likely to get the disease.

## **How do I know if I have periodontal disease?**

Periodontal disease affects people in different ways. Some people may have many painful signs and others may not even know that they have the disease. It is important to see your dentist if you have any of these signs:

- Gums that bleed easily
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Gums that look as if they have pulled away from your teeth
- Areas of pus around your teeth
- Loose teeth
- Bad breath or bad taste that will not go away

Your dentist will do an exam to see if you have periodontal disease. He will check your gums for bleeding and swelling. He will measure the pockets around your teeth and the amount of bone loss that you may have. He will also check your teeth for movement.

## **How is periodontal disease treated?**

In the early stages, a cleaning and improved daily home care may be all the treatment that you need. In the later stages, a special cleaning called “scaling and root planing” may be needed to remove tartar and toxins from under the gums. This may make the pockets shrink and help the gums to reattach to the tooth. If the pockets are still too deep for you to keep clean, your doctor may give you medications or rinses to help control the bacteria or he may do surgery to shape the gums down so they can be cleaned properly.

## **How can periodontal disease be prevented?**

- Properly brush two to three times a day and floss daily to remove bacteria from your teeth
- See a dentist two times a year for exams and cleanings or as directed
- If you smoke, STOP. Smokers are seven times more likely to get periodontal disease
- Eat a well-balanced diet to keep your body healthy to fight infections
- Avoid clenching or grinding your teeth. This puts extra stress on your bone and gums and may cause them to be destroyed

Even with good oral hygiene and healthy lifestyles, people with diseases that affect their immune system, who take certain medicines, or have a family history of periodontal disease will find it harder to prevent gum disease. See your dentist for additional advice.